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TTY is the Acronym for Text Telephone ... But Why?

When telecommunications for deaf people started in the mid-1960s, obsolete teletypewriters were used to communicate through couplers and telephones. These first **TeleTYpewriters** were 200 to 300 pounds each, noisy and ugly. They were sometimes called clunkers, monsters, or mailboxes, but they were *all* called Teletypewriters -- much the same way we use Xerox for copying machines or Kleenex for tissue. Therefore, the acronym was TTY, and this terminology became popular among TTY users.

In the 1970s, smaller models weighing under five pounds came out. To distinguish between the clunkers and the lightweight models, a new terminology was created: telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD).

As time went by, this second acronym became more of a problem than a solution. One does not have to be deaf to use a "TDD." The devices make it possible for deaf, hard of hearing, speech disabled, and hearing people to communicate with each other by telephone. To add to the confusion, teletypewriters were considered telecommunications devices for the deaf, too.

In Europe, text telephone is the common name for *all* these devices. It does not indicate the user, simply that printed words are transmitted through telecommunications -- telephone lines or airwaves. In an attempt to achieve international consistency and remove the "labeling," the Federal Communications Commission decided to use the term "text telephone" and the acronym "TT."

Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc., a not-for-profit organization of consumers active since 1968, conducted a poll on consumer preference for an acronym for text telephones. **TTY was selected overwhelmingly!**

The reasons most often cited were:

1. Signed, TTY is rhythmic to the eye, and it's easy for hearing people to say.
2. "TTY" reminds users of the history of adaptive telecommunications, and recognizes historic contributions by the teletypewriter coupler's deaf inventors to deaf history and culture.
3. Finally, in sign language, "TT" is embarrassingly similar to the common sign for "toilet;" spoken, "TT" has similar connotations.

TDI joins its members in urging the public, advertisers, the telephone industry and the FCC to adopt the historic acronym TTY for text telephone!

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